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Consorting with Kali: Migration and Identity in Naipaul's "One Out of Many"

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The Indian in America is a rather lonely being, having lost his roots in one place and not grown them in another.... Few Indians in America make any attempt to integrate into American culture or social life...Outwardly happy, he is secretly gnawed by some vague discontent and aware of some inner turbulence of vacuum he cannot define.

R. K. Narayan

Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed.

Stuart Hall

Above all, human beings need to belong. The quest to locate a stable entity around which to construct our identities and our sense of belonging is intensified in modern societies, in which ancient tribal and traditional certainties have shattered. Instead, we confront myriad, ambiguous and shape shifting identities and modes of being. Globally, mass migrations, interracial relations, hybrid and transitional identities increasingly characterize societies.

Modern migration, in its unvarnished form, can be characterized by the movement of labor to capital. The colonial enterprise, the largest such endeavor in human history, sought, to erase the subjectivities of the colonized and to re-inscribe alien and alienating identities. One legacy has been a spate of mass and individual neuroses. Related to this, is the ongoing impulse within diasporic individuals and multi-cultural societies, to grapple with the dilemma of "who are we becoming" in the processes of transportation and transculturation.¹ Moreover, perhaps even for the majority, this grail is as such that the most desirable ethnic identification is that which may be constructed as the most pristine, original and authentic. The greater the admixture, the greater suspicion of loss, the greater the impulse to name, to classify, to interrogate, to justify; and the greater the imperative to reclaim ethnic and ancestral (un)certainties.

In "One Out of Many," V.S. Naipaul presents a terse, multifaceted exploration of transcultural migration. Traversing rural, urban and metropolitan landscapes, the mild-mannered protagonist from the hill country in India touches down in Washington "the capital of the world." Santosh (Hindi for fulfillment and peace) loses the protection of his traditional caste-defined social identity and is constrained to craft a hybrid identity against the backdrop of the American counterculture hippie movement and the Civil Rights Movement. The former represents youth migration away from the myth of a monolithic, idealized American dream/identity; the latter represents the outworking of forced African migration to the Americas.

The narrative raises fundamental issues. What confers ethnic identity? On what is fundamental commitment to cultural and ethnic identity based? How does the creative writer employ the ancient language of myth to explore transitions into alien worlds? This paper shies away from an essentialist view of ethnic identity. Rather, I choose to interrogate how commitment to ethnic identity changes in specific historical or personal circumstances, and to explore possible consequences of such commitment, as demonstrated in the fictional scenario.

Naipaul's immigrant Santosh represents a man in a liminal transitional state with all the ambiguity and potentiality which that implies. Victor Turner argues that all rites of passage or "transition[s] are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying "threshold" in Latin) and aggregation":

The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated. (147)²

Naipaul's first-person narrator retraces his journey, speaking (presumably from a settled spatio-temporal reference point) of his meanderings as a threshold person, that is, one who "elude[s] or slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner147). Santosh begins his tale at its ending: "I am now an American citizen and I live in Washington, capital of the world. Many people, both here and in India, will feel I have done well. But" (21). The narrative undermines the opening statement by dealing with the gaping chasm underlying the "but". The tale told in retrospect is an act of memory, which reconstructs the process of (un)becoming.

The first phase for Santosh is separation from the crowded, warm cocoon within the servant class of Bombay pavement dwellers.³ Santosh's sense of self is shored up on every hand by caste certainties—unambiguous communal affirmation, prestige and respect based on commonly shared, widely acknowledged markers; hierarchical social ordering with its implied enforcement of communal sanctions. The sense of "them and us" remains intact, because not all pavement dwellers are equal: "...some of us, like the tailor's bearer and myself, were domestics who lived in the street. The others were people who came to that bit of pavement to sleep. Respectable people; we did not encourage riff-raff" (21).

Within the relatively more stable communal environment, the I-narrator is closely intertwined with landscape as well as the community. The split between the memory of past joy and present discomfort inspires the narrator to canticles of praise so lyrical that I have taken the liberty of altering line length to emphasize their musicality:

I liked walking beside the Arabian Sea,
waiting for the sun to come up.
Then the city and the ocean gleamed like gold.
Alas for those morning walks,
that sudden ocean dazzle
the moist salt breeze on my face,
the flap of my shirt,
that first cup of hot sweet tea from a stall,
the taste of the first leaf cigarette. (22)

Appeal to visual, tactile, kinetic, auditory and gustatory senses creates a highly evocative, sensual experience. The sense of soothing harmony with the landscape is enhanced by the repetition of fricatives and sibilants. The entire scene is tinged with the sepia tones of nostalgia. Observe the interplay between the innocent experiencing self and the wiser, "westernized" narrator, displaced in time and space. Ironically, this description echoes the romanticized discourse of empire—with its resonances of the quest for eastern exotica and for gold. It resonates too our century's travel/tourism discourse with its relentless signification of "paradise". Although the narrator is speaking of a time of innocent, self-erasure, there is an intense insistence on first-person interiority. In the first seven lines, the pronoun I is used seven times. And the narrator and the implied author conspire in tones of gentle mockery. He muses: "I had become a city man" (22).

The second phase sees Santosh as migrant to the United States moving into a transitional (b)order/existence.⁴ Naipaul explores the responses of the individual under forces of unrelieved physical displacement and psychological disharmony. The journey itself is a humiliating, distasteful reminder of the culturally determined conditions and structures needed to sustain the most basic habits and postures of diet, dress, and defecation. Santosh undergoes extreme humiliation of an adult male who regresses to an infantile level in these elemental terms, even to the extent of being publicly flayed for losing control during defecation, while air borne.

"One Out of Many" represents the USA as a series of worlds that elide rather than intersect and constrains those who cross their borders into similarly truncated and suppressed postures. Mainstream American culture is never directly presented. Rather it is representationally mediated through the television screen as a psychic space to which Santosh travels daily to observe with anthropological penetration, a field in which the natives buy and clean, and clean and buy:

I entered the homes of Americans...I saw them buying clothes and cleaning clothes, buying motor cars and cleaning motor cars.... The effect of all this television on me was curious. If by some chance I saw an American on the street.... I felt I had caught the person in interval between his television duties. So

to some extent Americans have remained to me, as people not quite real, as people temporarily absent from television. (33)

The television portrayals cause Americans to become representationally essentialised. They suffer from a form of metonymic freezing such that the single face comes to represent the whole.

How is the displaced Asiatic portrayed in the new environment? He is self-effacing, anxious to please, vulnerable and jittery.⁵ Santosh's employer, a man of taste, transforms the apartment into a replica of a magazine layout "with books and Indian paintings and Indian fabrics and pieces of sculpture and bronze statues of our gods" (32). The harried ambassador presents an Easterner's offering to the West; an exotic scene set up to conform to the latter's stereotype, to earn his regard if not his respect. Significantly, he is presented as falsely representing, even prostituting the spirituality of his people and culture.

His encounter with the American (the only one who draws near) passes judgment on the spiritual paucity of the Oriental and Occidental alike. The culture-hungry dinner guest boasting that he paid a guard \$200 to hack off an entire head of an ancient god in a temple states blandly "... if I had a bottle of whisky he would have pulled down the whole temple for me" (37). The American disgraces even the televised representations by defiling the spiritual essence of another's culture, desecrating temples and seducing guides with mammon, into decapitating gods to create souvenirs. He is shadowed though, in the nervous employer who sees this blasphemous desecration only as a personal affront on his self-importance, "They think an official in Government is just the same as some poor guide scraping together a few rupees to keep body and soul together" (38).

Santosh's first halting steps towards the sense of individuality, which is pivotal to survival in the new society, come in response to sexual interest. A *hubshi*⁶ (read black) woman finds him attractive so he goes to the mirror to find out why. The discovery of an individual identity predictably yields an intense self-preoccupation, which, arguably, is anathema within his inherited cultural framework and endemic within his host society. The discovery that he has a face—unique and handsome—coincides with the recognition that he inhabits a racialized body. This, in turn, generates a frenzy of comparison with culturally determined, representationally ossified televised images of American beauty. The same applies to clothing. His domestic's garb, neither clean nor dirty, is an appropriate signifier of his station in the old world. In the new culture, it speaks of strangeness, filthiness and poverty. Yet to don clothes that would "speak the right language" in the new context, would be to abandon the markers of the old order and consequently his rightness of fit in his natal land. The hastily purchased green suit is physically and psychically too big because his emerging sense of self and self worth has not yet grown sufficiently.

At this stage of his journey, Santosh is moving away from a communal framework of interpretation towards the formulation of individual assessments and constructs of meaning. Self-

perception empowers him to perceive others with greater insight and understanding. He sees for the first time a different basis for kinship with his employer (shared age, vulnerability and anxiety) which penetrates beyond the former ritualized patterns of interaction "I used to tell him then that beside him I was as dirt...I was ceasing to see myself as part of my employer's presence, and beginning at the same time to see him as an outsider might see him" (36-37). Does greater understanding create greater intimacy in interpersonal interactions? At this stage, the nascent self becomes a vulnerable preserve to be defended. For Santosh, and presumably for the employer, this basis for more intimate interaction never comes to fruition; rather it creates the necessity for masking and subterfuge.

The recurrent motifs of Santosh's psychical displacement are helplessness and claustrophobia. As he gradually becomes acquainted with the metropolitan maze, he hovers in what Turner terms an ambiguous threshold state. In his nightmarish wanderings, he vacillates between humility, nothingness and a sense of tentative potentiality to become and even perchance to belong. Santosh who has not been homeless on a Bombay pavement now is cast adrift seeking a context within which to locate himself. He learns painfully that identity is first mirrored by community and only subsequently appropriated by an individual. His caste sensibility imparts the fear of contamination that hinders him from making contact with the other.

Santosh wanders in and out of potential sub-cultural communities; mainstream culture remains hermetically sealed behind the television screen. His initial encounter is with a friendly *hubshi* cashier who teaches him his first English words: "Me black and beautiful." The pronominal reference is ambiguous but one can infer from this an invitation to locate himself as a "soul brother." The second phrase invites him to adopt a stance that is oppositional and adversarial to the dominant authority structure. The entire formula is "Me black and beautiful ... He pig" (34). He wanders into cafés without shoes only to be rejected as a hippie; in the hippie cafés he is welcomed but atavistically sniffed because he carries the pervasive odor of hashish. Eligibility for access to each potential community is cast in negatives—he is not white like the *hubshi*; not a soul brother because he cannot identify with their struggle; not nonconformist like the bare-footed, weed smoking hippies; not disguised (externally) like the Mexican waiters dressed to provide Indian authenticity at the restaurant.

None of these ambiguous states of identity is as compelling and repulsive as that of the Hari Krishna sect, forever sealed in inbetweenity. They appear as ludicrous examples of cultural syncretism, dancing somewhat like Red Indians in a cowboy movie, while chanting Sanskrit words in praise of Lord Krishna:

I was very pleased. But then a disturbing thought came to me. It might have been because of the half-caste appearance of the dancers; it might have been their bad Sanskrit pronunciation and their accent. I thought that these people were now strangers, but that perhaps once upon a time they had been like me. Perhaps, as in

some story, they had been brought here among the *hubshi* as captives a long time ago and had become a lost people, like our own wandering gypsy folk, and had forgotten who they were. When I thought that, I lost my pleasure in the dancing; and I felt for the dancers the sort of distaste we feel when we are faced with something that should be kin but turns out not to be, turns out to be degraded like a deformed man, or like a leper, who from a distance looks whole. (30)

He is perceptive enough to accurately assess that, even within India, syncretic hybridity is the legacy of the travelers, but his rigidity and fear of contamination lead him to reject the pleasure of kinship and potential for community which they offer. Syncretism and hybridity bring risk, not enrichment.

What are the lessons to be learnt? Multiple identities can be evoked in multiple scenarios. Categories of ethnic identities are not without ambiguity. Rather they are capable of being understood and appropriated in a range of ways. According to anthropologist Aisha Khan:

...these categories are frequently equivocal: contingent upon individual perception (though obviously not entirely) and upon varying and not always predictable emphases or combinations of attributes. Categorizations of ethnic identity that marshal a variety of historical, social, and cultural dimensions in their constructions may also encompass apparently contradictory images since traits, qualities, stereotypes, and the like are not self contained or mutually exclusive. Indeed, the very fact of combination and ambiguity foregrounds the fluidity of ethnic identity. (180)

Despite Santosh's initial revulsion, for a time the Hari Krishna spin magic because they demonstrate the intense potential for bonding which can occur within a liminal state. This bonding resembles the second of two major models of human relatedness identified by Turner. The first is of "society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of political-legal-economic positions" based on "caste, class or rank hierarchies." The second, which emerges in the liminal period, is "unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*" (148).⁷ In Western society, the latter state is manifested in groups such as the hippies and the Hari Krishnas who emphasize "spontaneity, immediacy, and existence." The hippies "stress personal relationships rather than social obligations, and regard sexuality as a polymorphic instrument of immediate *communitas* rather than as the basis for an enduring, structured social tie" (Turner 153).

As much as the Hari Krishna retain their appeal even to a mature Santosh contemplating his final "renunciation," on a more fundamental level he cannot join them because he learns to read them for what they are: "I had watched the people in the circle long enough to know that they were of their city; that their television life awaited them; that their renunciation was not like mine" (56). Moreover, it is the ancient community not the transient *communitas* that he craves.

Unwilling and unable to renounce the old framework of interaction, he pines after the reinvention of the group into a nostalgic, gold-tinted dream of another life: an allegory of a traveling community, a village welcome and the "sinking sun" which turns the "dust to gold" (56).

It is in his relationship with Priya that Santosh's most valid option for community emerges. Priya, who has successfully maneuvered the bittersweet phases of transition and has attained a viable hybrid identity, emerges as a guide and model of acculturation. Blending divergent stereotypes, he retains that marvelous linguistic meandering and philosophical bent of India, astutely combined with the hardheaded business acumen of America. Moreover, Santosh names him as an individual and potentially as a friend.

Reflecting a stratified rigid, traditional framework in which a person's occupation, status and social designation are reflected from birth to death in caste designation, Santosh never names his initial employer.⁸ But Priya is named from inception and relates to Santosh on an intimate, individual basis, until he offers to introduce him to a potentially viable community. These are Indians in Washington who meet to reaffirm community, rootedness and belonging by ritualized viewing of Indian movies. The road to the cinema takes them through the burnt out *hubshi* streets:

...old smoke-stained sign boards announcing what was no longer true. Cars raced along the wide roads; there was life only on the roads. I thought I would vomit with fear.

I said, "Take me back, *sahib*."

I had used the wrong word. Once, I had used the word a hundred times daily. But then I had considered myself a small part of my employer's presence and the word as not servile; it was more like a name.... Priya I had always called Priya; it was his wish, the American way, man to man. With Priya the word was servile. And he responded to the word...I never called him by his name again. (48-49)

Santosh's anxiety is triggered here by the presence (even in absentia) of the ubiquitous *hubshi* it manifests itself as a mild agoraphobia, that is fear of open spaces. Again he signals his rejection of his emerging individuality and new patterns of interaction with the verbal marker that restores the time worn but increasingly irrelevant hierarchies.

The highpoint of his perception of his radical racial difference and horror at being defiled by contact crystallizes in his obsession with the African-American whom he signifies *ashubshi* (Hindi for Abyssinian). Underlying this obsession is the strong sense of sexual fascination /revulsion which steadily accumulates. It is not surprising then that an overpowering female figure surfaces in the African-American woman with whom he eventually defiles himself through sexual union. Santosh's fear of violation with the *hubshi* is based on the belief in karma and transmigration.⁹

It is written in our books, both holy and not so holy, that it is indecent and wrong for a man of our blood to embrace the *hubshi* woman. To be dishonoured in this life, to be born a cat or a monkey or a *hubshi* in the next! (34-35)

With the growing recognition of individuality and freedom to act comes an imperative to accept responsibility for action. It is here that the Santosh's involvement with the *hubshi* woman (whom he constructs as Kali) as a consort takes on dual significance.

What then is the significance of the evocation the myth and symbol of Kali? A grim and terrifying mother goddess of death and destruction, Kali is particularly prominent in the Tantric Hindu tradition.¹⁰ Physically, she is revolting.¹¹ Emotionally, she is cruel and brutal, excessive, always demanding, never satisfied. Symbolically she is associated with disorder, chaos, blood, battle and vengeance. Moreover, Kali is intoxicated and she is mad:

She is dark as a great cloud, clad in dark clothes. Her tongue is poised as if to lick. She has fearful teeth, sunken eyes, and is smiling. She wears a necklace of snakes, the half-moon rests on her forehead, she has matted hair, and is engaged in licking a corpse. Her sacred thread is a snake, and she lies on a bed of snakes. She holds a garland of fifty heads. She has a large belly, and on her head is Ananta with a thousand heads. On all sides she is surrounded by snakes... [she] has corpses for ear ornaments. (Quoted in Kinsley: 81)¹²

Given that the tribe, as a means of explaining threatening reality and ordering chaotic experiences creates myths, it is not surprising that Santosh, newly ejected and meandering through formless, disrupted worlds should invest his mating with the *hubshi* woman with mythic significance. In fighting temptation, Santosh had prayed to the bronze gods, installed as living room ornaments, that he would not be dishonored. However, in their designation to ornamental status they have been rendered powerless and are overturned by a flesh and blood incarnation of the mother archetype in Hindu culture.

There is much to support an interpretation that his sexual union with the *hubshi* betrays his basic inability to move into individuality and responsibility. The incident is narrated with subtle shifts in voice that reveal how Santosh rejects responsibility for the act:

The *hubshi* woman came in, moving among my employer's ornaments like a bull. I was greatly provoked. The smell was too much; so was the sight of her armpits. I fell. She dragged me down on the couch.... I saw the moment, helplessly, as one of dishonour. I saw her as Kali, goddess of death and destruction, coal-black, with a red tongue and white eyeballs and many powerful arms. I expected her to be wild and fierce but she added insult to injury by being very playful, as though, because I was small and strange, the act was not real. She laughed all the time. I would have liked to withdraw, but the act took over and completed itself. And then I felt dreadful. (38)

The sex act is presented as a reversal of the male aggressor, female receiver mould. The woman becomes a horny bull (male gender) who attacks, mauls and humiliates Santosh (the small, defiled, feminized, recipient of the sexually aggressive act) as less than a man. The impetus for the sex act comes not from the dictates of his appetites, the thrusts of his loins, but rather from the strength of her many powerful arms that drag him to destruction. At each stage he is governed, if not by the power of the woman, then by the compulsiveness of the act.

Since Santosh has not chosen, he has simply perceived and then fallen; the encounter can be seen as Kali's victory over impotent, ornamental gods. The powerful destructive mother goddess sucks the male into the womb. It is a rejection of manliness and exertion of individual will. His subsequent attempts at re-establishing contact with the bronze gods consist of dissipating guilt in a heightened emotionalism by theatrical austerities; rubbing his penis with a lemon, rolling naked on the floor and howling, donning a dhoti and seeking to meditate, and fasting. The insincerity surfaces the moment he gets an audience to impress with his super spirituality. These rituals of reintegration prove ineffective. Symbolically, he attains freer identification and release through the burning of the city in rebellion against social injustice, inequity and pernicious racism as an act of civil unrest. Here too he longs for the fire started by the *hubshi* (a parallel of the fiery passion triggered by the woman) to annihilate him, "I wanted everything in the city, even the apartment block, even the apartment, even myself, to be destroyed and consumed. ... I wanted the very idea of escape to become absurd" (40). He longs for the fire of purification to become the fire of consumption, an engulfment that ends individual choice and moral responsibility.

The *hubshi* woman bears the symbolic weight of Santosh's fear and resistance to the Indo-American hybrid identity that is inexorably emerging. But there is an even deeper denial. According to Turner, in the liminal state, norms that govern structured relationships are transgressed or dissolved. Underlying anomie is latent potential for new and creative bonding that holds tremendous potency:

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edge of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority.... Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with [...] periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than classifications, since they incite men to action as well as to thought. (153)

It is within this context that the dual significance of Kali myth and symbolism poses another alternative. Santosh's caste sensibility imparts virulent, deep-rooted fear of despoliation and pollution. His small stature and the *hubshi's* sheer bulk generate a desperate and extreme vulnerability. Yet to gain citizenship, Santosh eventually marries the *hubshi*. The question remains is legal standing all that he stands to gain?

In yielding to the black woman's flesh, Santosh is saying yes to death; death of the old self. Yet tacitly, he is acknowledging, as all migrants must, the possibility of rebirth of a new hybrid self. On the physical plane, his union can potentially say yes to life, to sensuality, to procreation and to the other face of the dark goddess: "Kali's dark, voluptuous, bloody presence is similarly "wet."...Immodest in her nudity and aggressive in her sexuality, she represents the ever fertile womb from which springs the eternal throb of life....—the throb of life gone out of control..." (Kinsley 155). He is caught in a maelstrom of change, unable to return, afraid to proceed. Santosh's mating with Kali / the *hubshi*, represents the potential to take to his bosom "the forbidden thing" which encapsulates all his fears—loss of self, language, order, framework of meaning, caste, ritual pollution.¹³ Encoded in his signification of the *hubshi* as Kali is the possibility to adopt the pathway of the transgressive Tantric hero for whom the "forbidden is not to be propitiated, feared, ignored, or avoided Kali is to be confronted boldly...and thereby assimilated, overcome and transformed into a vehicle of salvation" (Kinsley 112). Here is the opportunity to transcend the polarities inherent in consciousness and identity, self and other; chaos and order, past and present, and thereby allow Kali/*hubshi* to become "an agent of transformation and renewal, fostering his unfolding and integration within the community" (Stephanides 235). Not in works cited This is at the root of his obsessive fascination/revulsion. It is this that beckons from the moment the *hubshi* gives him his first words of English, his first glimpse of self in the mirror. It is this specter/possibility that hangs over the burnt out street. Ultimately, it is this latent possibility that he also denies.

In making this decision, Santosh reassesses his entire history, "I hadn't escaped; I had never been free. I had been abandoned. I was like nothing. I made myself nothing. And I couldn't turn back" (53). The emptiness he feels at the core, ejected from the warmth of comfortable society, he now falsely reinterprets as the calm of renunciation: "To be empty is to be calm, it is to renounce" (55) His union becomes his formal renunciation to Kali only as the goddess of death and destruction. It is his rejection of Kali as chaos and disorder on the brink of being contained. He enters into a stage of quiescence permanently trapped in the borderline state, a threshold person unable to die and powerless to born. Ironically within the communal gaze, he achieves his Karma, entering into his next incarnation life reborn a *hubshi*:

...and then the dark house in which I now live.
Its smells are strange, everything in it is strange. But my strength in this house is that I am a stranger. I have closed my mind and heart to the English language, ... to the pictures of *hubshi* runners and boxers and musicians on the wall. I do not want to understand or learn anymore. (57)

But migration with its attendant dis-eases—trauma, displacement, depression, despair and acculturation—has given birth to the narrator in exile. Santosh is after all the working class, uneducated immigrant. His is the voice that is usually silenced in the travel narratives—the voice of the helper, the servant, the Sherpa, the invisible side kick to the authentic hero.¹⁴ In this sense, Santosh gives face to the faceless and voice to the silenced.

His voice testifies from the no man's land of cultural liminality of grim experiential knowledge of multiple sites of dislocation and non-belonging. And he constructs a subtle, deeply intuitive, complex, narrative of self in an alien tongue which he refuses to speak, claiming: "I have closed my mind and heart to the English language" (57). Instead he hones the language to perfection to relate the trauma of excoriating his native tongue, to climb into an alien language/skin. From this position, he breaks the seal of representation to speak back to the American mainstream culture of subcultures about Americas they would perhaps prefer not to acknowledge. He sends a solemn warning to naive and complacent would-be immigrants. And from this position he enters into fruitful discourse with us.

The outcome of Naipaul's character invites us to interrogate Bhabha's contention for shifting the issue of identity from a concern with the "persuasions of personhood" and reshaping it as "a question of historical and geographical location.... shifting the question of identity from the ontological and epistemological imperative—What is identity? To face the ethical and political prerogative—What are identities for?" (Bhabha 434). A useful proposition perhaps, but only if it is viable? Santosh's deep seated inability to release a sense of self which condemns him to a state of living death, implies that for this first generation migrant and perhaps for many others who have walked in his shoes such a shift may well nigh be impossible.

Consider an alternative. The progeny of ex-slaves, ex-indentees, ex-colonials will, of necessity, pursue reconnection with erased, submerged, defaced ancestral identities. But...they can only be the bedrock, not the substance of the imperative to locate something fixed around which to construct a usable identity. In the beginning, I explored Santosh's "westernized" narrative of "authentic" origin. I end with the words of Stuart Hall "Identity is not only a story, a narrative which we tell ourselves about ourselves, [they are] stories which change with historical circumstances [Identities] are the way in which we are recognized and then come into step into the place of recognition which others give us (6). Such a formulation could conceivably grant if not Santosh, then his progeny, the power to "re-aggregate" or even the power to return.

Notes

¹In relation to modern Europe and North America, Werner Sollers argues in “Ethnicity” that ethnicity and ethnocentrism may be described as Europe and North America’s most successful export items: “The processes of modernization and urbanization which weakened specific forms of familial, vocational and local belonging strengthened the commitment to more abstract forms of generalizing identifications such as ethnic and national ones” (289).

²Turner describes reaggregation as re-incorporation into a relatively stable state in within which the individual has “rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and ‘structural’ type” (147).

³In 1962, Naipaul visited his ancestral homeland India for the first time. He wrote in *India: A Wounded Civilization* of rural urban migration into Bombay. “It is said that every day 1500 more people, about 350 families, arrive in Bombay to live. They come mainly from the countryside and they have very little; and in Bombay there isn’t room for them.... By day the streets are clogged; at night the pavements are full of sleepers.... One report says that 100,000 people sleep on the pavements of Bombay; but this figure seems low. And the beggars: are there only 20,000 in Bombay, as one newspaper article says, or are there 70,000, the figure given on another day (57-8).

⁴Significantly, of the thirteen-part short narrative, the first deals with Santosh’s life in Bombay and the last, with the stage of quiescence into which he settles; eleven parts deal with what I have classified (with reference to Turner) as a liminal state.

⁵Naipaul carefully sketches his Indian males as the passive, mother-centred, insular men who have grave difficulty adjusting to Western culture and society. When I encounter criticism of this now stereotypical view of the Asian migrant, I contemplate (albeit briefly) the power of representation and the age-old mystery of the chicken and the egg.

⁶Hindi for Abyssinian; the term is used by Santosh as a signifier for African-Americans.

⁷Turner prefers this Latin term *communitas* instead of the English word “community” to distinguish this “modality of social relationship” from “an area of common living” (148).

⁸Similarly, he never names his wife even as an African American, far less with a personal name reflective of her unique, individual identity.

⁹Belief in Karma does not necessarily constitute a deterrent to the performance of bad deeds in the present incarnation. Indeed it has the potential to do the opposite. The very deeds which would lead to a negative repercussion in future life may be interpreted as having been decided by evil deeds in a past life, and hence accepted as the present Karma.

¹⁰Drawing reference to famous Bengali literary figures such as Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chatterjee, Kinsley indicates that Kali is both extremely popular and extremely maligned by Hindu and non Hindu alike (Kinsley 81).

¹¹This statement must be qualified by a point made by Lipner that to the devotees both of the more socially acceptable and the more transgressive forms of Kali worship, she is not revolting. Rather devotees even tenderly plead in relation to her more shameful attributes: "*Oh Kali! Why dost Thou roam about nude?/ Art thou not ashamed Mother?*" (From *Rama Prasada Devotional Songs*).

¹²Quoted in Kinsley from the *dhyana mantra of guhya-kali* from Krsnananda Agamavagisa's *Tantrasara* 1:326 (81).

¹³Kinsley writes: "The figure of Kali conveys the image of death, destruction, fear, terror, the all-consuming aspect of reality. As such she is also "a forbidden thing" or the forbidden par excellence for she is death itself" (112).

¹⁴The authentic hero is traditionally constructed in travel narratives as the individual with means and agency to travel. Even (or maybe even especially) in great tales of discovery, the contribution of the guide, the helper, the servant, is erased.

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